

## **HIV / AIDS**

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#### **House Bill Bars Federal AIDS Treatment for Immigrants September 25, 1996**

##### **All Things Considered (NPR)**

*GUESTS: Rep. BARNEY FRANK (D-MA); Rep. DANA ROHRABACHER (R-CA); Rep. HENRY WAXMAN (D-CA);*

ROBERT SIEGEL, Host: There is one more provision of the immigration bill that was inserted yesterday. That provision would deny federally funded medical treatment to all immigrants, legal and illegal, infected with the AIDS virus.

NPR's Vicky Que has that part of the story.

VICKY QUE, Reporter: Initially, the bill barred immigrants from receiving medical care for more than a year unless they had a communicable disease. But a provision added during the conference committee made an exception to that rule. Immigrants, whether they're legal or illegal, could not receive federal assistance for medical treatment for HIV or AIDS.

Congressman Barney Frank, a Democrat from Massachusetts, accused the Republicans of sneaking the provision into the bill.

Rep. BARNEY FRANK (D-MA): And then in the mysterious darkness that they use instead of a conference report, they gave an exception to the exception. What's the exception to the exception? If you are here legally and you are HIV-positive, you may not get any treatment if you need federal funds. If you are here legally and you contracted this terrible illness, which they profess to think is something we ought to fight, then you are by this bill condemned to death with no help.

VICKY QUE: Under the bill, legal and illegal immigrants would still be able to get tested for HIV, but neither would be eligible for treatment if they test positive.

No one knows how many people this bill would affect, but proponents say in states like Texas, California and Florida, where there are larger numbers of immigrants, many of the people who receive publicly funded services for HIV or AIDS are foreignborn.

Language in the welfare reform bill would leave it up to the states to decide whether they wanted to fund medical assistance for immigrants under Medicaid. But Congressman Dana Rohrabacher, a Republican from California, says paying for AIDS care would take away benefits from people who are legally here.

Rep. DANA ROHRABACHER (R-CA): Giving illegal aliens benefits that should be going to our own people is a betrayal of our people. If someone is sick and illegally in this country, they should be deported from this country to protect our own people instead of spending hundreds of thousands of dollars that should go for the health benefits of our own citizens.

VICKY QUE: Federal laws prohibit people infected with the AIDS virus from coming into the country, so many immigrants are often afraid to get tested or seek medical help because they're afraid of getting

deported. That's why opponents worry that the bill will discourage people from going to get tested for HIV. They argue it'll end up costing the government more; many won't show up for treatment until they are really sick and need emergency care, which costs more.

Congressman Henry Waxman, a Democrat from California, says it could create serious complications particularly in situations where women are infected and pregnant.

Rep. HENRY WAXMAN, (D-CA): All the medical experts are advising pregnant women to be tested to see if they're HIV-positive, because if they are, if they undergo AZT treatment, it can reduce the transmission of the HIV to newborns by two-thirds. Well, these women won't be eligible to be treated even if it could save the life of their newborn, who will be an American citizen and will then we'll be faced with the costs of treating an AIDS baby where the AIDS might have been prevented.

VICKY QUE: White House aides say the president is opposed to blocking immigrants from receiving federal assistance for treatment for HIV, but they say he hasn't said whether he would sign the immigration bill or not.

I'm Vicky Que in Washington.